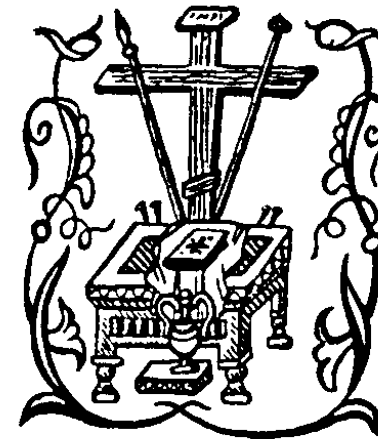


CONCERNING TRUE AND FALSE BISHOPS  
AND COUNCILS,  
ACCORDING TO ORTHODOX  
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE



HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON

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## CONCERNING TRUE AND FALSE BISHOPS AND COUNCILS, ACCORDING TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Recently, Athanasius of Paros (+1833) was officially proclaimed a saint. The island of Paros should boast in the Lord, because after Saint Theoktiste and Saint Arsenius (+1877), it has acquired a third mediator and intercessor in Heaven — a prolific writer and ardent lover of our holy traditions, a great theologian.

This blessed man was persecuted by the bishops of the Phanar [i.e. the Ecumenical Patriarchate] because of his love and devotion to Orthodoxy's sacred traditions. Finally, however, truth prevailed; his struggles were justified, and God glorified him with the crown of sainthood.

Of late, one of his unpublished works, "An Exposition of the Truth Concerning the Disturbances on the Holy Mountain," was printed, and, among other things, he writes the following concerning the nature and work of Councils:

An Orthodox Council\* is that which unwaveringly preserves the doctrines, traditions and canons of the Catholic Church. The Council which does not preserve these, on the contrary, is that which propounds evil and heretical teachings, following some other understanding, and is for this cause subjected to the anathema of a holy, ecumenical Council.

Therefore, the word "Council" is not always august and venerable. Rather, only that Council which follows those written and unwritten traditions passed down to us by the holy Apostles and the Catholic Church, is august, venerable, and

\*The reader should have in mind that the Greek word *σύνδοδος* can be translated either as "council" or "synod."

holy. We are under obligation to accept and observe the decisions of such a Council; as for the voice of strangers, and other Councils, we neither acknowledge it, nor submit to it.

We are able to enumerate many councils that propounded erroneous doctrines. However, lest we waste time uselessly, let the reader himself see the second volume of the Synodal [Decisions] and he will find them and see that they are referred to literally as “Robber” councils. What is worse is that these councils were not only local ones and assemblies of a few bishops, but they were even “ecumenical” councils of many bishops, such as the one that gathered in Ephesus the second time [449] and agreed with the monophysite Euthyches and was responsible for the death of the most pious and most holy Flavian, the Archbishop of Constantinople. Then there was the council of a very large number of bishops during the reign of Copronymus [754], which raved against the holy icons. Likewise, there was another during the reign of Basil the Macedonian, which called itself “ecumenical,” but proved itself to be most lawless, since it deposed and anathematized the most holy Photius the Great. It is unnecessary even to mention the so-called ecumenical, but actually supremely Robber assembly in Florence.

So then, once again we affirm that the word “council” is not always august and venerable, in that there is, on the one hand, the Church and assembly of the saints, and, on the other hand, the congregation of evil-doers, as the psalm says.

Such, then, are their names and their teachings, either for good, or for evil. And we have shown some examples of those that were for evil. But simple people, that is, the unlearned, are unable to make this distinction because of their lack of education. When they hear the word “council”, this is enough for them. Straightway they honor it and obey it, and with unrestrained zeal they raise a clamor and trouble all things.

trying to apply its principles for their own purposes and to impose them on others as well.

### Who Is Within the Church

Therefore, how can these bishops understand Saint Maximus the Confessor when he was asked what Church he belonged to (when, in fact, he had separated himself from all the local Churches and Patriarchates that had accepted the heresy of Monothelitism), and he answered, “Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the Faith.” That is, Saint Maximus did not consider membership in the Church to be a matter of union with the bishop, but of union with the truth. You are obliged to be united with the bishop if he is organically united with the truth. If you are united with a bishop, though he is not united with the truth, but with error and Ecumenism, this is an indication that you also automatically leave the Church, which is expressed not by the bishop, but by the Fathers, Holy Tradition, and the sacred canons.



with themselves, regardless of whether or not they themselves are organically united with the Fathers, with Holy Tradition, with the sacred canons, and with Christ Himself. Whoever obeys them is considered (by them) to be a living and true member of the Church, whereas whoever disobeys them is considered dead, outside the Church, and an instrument of the devil. The tragic mistake of these bishops is that they have no living concept and knowledge of what the word “Church” means, but rather they have a papal and legalistic notion that suits their passions.

The position of the Fathers, however, is that the only shepherds who belong to the Church are those who cleave to the whole truth and make no compromises with what is false, especially in matters of the Faith. The only shepherds who belong to the Church are those who have not followed a path alien to that of the Fathers; it is only the ones who have not changed Holy Tradition by dispensing with parts of the Gospel or showing indifference toward the holy canons. Therefore, if, for example, the Holy Fathers and Holy Tradition esteem the Papists, the Protestants, the Monophysites, etc., as the greatest enemies of the Church, and contemporary bishops embrace these heterodox and call them “holy and beloved fellow bishops,” and “sister Churches,” this in itself is an indication that all these bishops who do these things, and all they who tolerate these words and actions, even by their silence, do not belong to the Church of the Fathers of Orthodox Christianity, but rather belong to those whom they embrace and acclaim. And if the people follow, and identify with, and commemorate these bishops, then they too are of the same type and belong to the same assemblage, according to the words of the Lord: “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit.” If these bishops consider the people’s voice, protest, resistance and disobedience (in matters in which Holy Tradition imposes this course of action), as rebellion, unlawful conspiracy and separation from the Church, then this is a proof that these bishops have loved the Papacy more than the Papists themselves, and that they are

Concerning such people, the holy Apostles affirms that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.\*

Of course, these truths written by Saint Athanasius were proclaimed throughout the ages by many saints. These holy men who struggled for Orthodox truth, suffered varied persecutions at the hands of many false bishops. Indeed, especially after the calendar innovation of 1924, many beautiful studies were published, referring in depth to the “golden age” of the Church, during which the confession of her faithful children flourished. A few weeks ago, hieromonk, Fr. Euthymius Trikaminas [of the new calendar State Church of Greece], published an excellent study entitled, “The Relations of a Bishop with a Council, and of a Bishop with the People of God.” We publish below a large portion of this study because of its timeliness. . .



IT IS TRUE that never have our people been so uninformed, so lacking in education, and, at the same time, so indifferent, as in our days. It is true that never have such guileful ways and such dishonorable means been used in order to keep the people of God in the darkness of ignorance. But it is equally true that men have contrived to hide their own passions behind the sins of the shepherds. Thus, the quality of the members of the Church has reached its nadir; great betrayals of the Faith are esteemed, as the saying goes, “of no consequence”.

The result of this situation is that an erroneous opinion has formed concerning very serious matters in the Church’s faith and life, and the Church is thus being led into a Western form of an external Christianity intertwined with an internal, individualistic fragmentation.

\* This work of Saint Athanasius of Paros is subtitled “History and Theology of the Kollyvades Movement, Based on Unpublished Documents,” edited by Theodoretus, Athonite priestmonk, Athens, 1988, p. 127.

### The Wrong Message

The first wrong message that has gone out among the people concerns the position and purpose of a bishop and the local synods of bishops of each autonomous Church. In our days, since it suits their purposes, the bishops have made the local synod of bishops identical with the Church, and they maintain that whatever any such synod says is also what the Church says, and without further examination it must be put into practice by everyone, whether or not the synod's decision is in agreement with the Gospel and Holy Tradition. Some examples of this identification of the local synod with the Church are what we hear from the mouths of some bishops, when they are talking about a Council, and they say: "The *Church* elected me," or "The *Church* sent me," or "I am being obedient to the *Church*."

How is it possible for ecumenistic bishops to understand Saint Theodore the Studite, when he says, "Let us not place a stumbling-block before the Church of God, which can be comprised of only three Orthodox [Christians], as the saints say" (PG 99, 1049B). As you can see, the saints distanced the Church from the bishops' offices and established it among the Orthodox people, to the great sorrow of these bishops. Saint Gregory Palamas' words on this matter are typical: "They who are of the Church, are of the truth; and they who are not of the truth, are not of the Church of Christ." How, therefore, is it possible for these ecumenistic bishops to be of the Church of Christ, since they distort Holy Tradition, embrace heretics, sign heretical and demonic agreements with various heresies, and accept the lawless laws of politicians? How is it possible for them to belong to the Church of Christ, when they are on good terms with everyone and excommunicate only those who will not obey their lawless decrees?

All these things are happening because these men who possess mitres and episcopal staffs have misunderstood their function. What

Bryennios, the great teacher of the Church, says the following, "While renouncing their teaching, we must also flee communion with them" (*The Discovered Works*, Vol. II, p. 25 [in Greek]). That is, we must flee far from and have no ecclesiastical communion with those who have ideas and teachings which are at variance with the Church.

### The Abuse of Truth

So, in their attempt to impose upon the people of God obedience to themselves, the ecumenistic bishops use the words of the Fathers — who indeed speak of obedience when, however, they are referring to good and holy shepherds. The ecumenistic bishops use the canons of *The Rudder*, which refer to the correct relations that exist between a shepherd and his flock when the shepherd is truly a shepherd and not a wolf. They apply all these texts indiscriminately to themselves, without making that essential distinction between a good and evil shepherd, between a father and a general, or a tyrant. And though these bishops know that what the Fathers said about good shepherds does not apply to themselves, and though they know that the Fathers said other things about ecumenistic [and heretical] bishops, who are worldly and "esteemed," they hide the truth and deceive our Christians, leading them by means of their own beliefs and lifestyle into a secular Christianity, into Ecumenism, and into a Church life that is superficial and marginal. As regards "synods", these bishops teach the people that only these assemblies are authoritative and responsible for solving the Church's problems, and that the people of God must not occupy itself with these matters, but must have confidence and blind obedience to the "synod". This type of bishop considers every resistance on the part of the people as rebellion, unlawful conspiracy and automatic separation from the Church.

Therefore, the ecumenistic bishops of the twentieth century have tied the Church to themselves; indeed, they have identified it

flee far from them as they would from a wolf. And lest it should be thought that we are expressing our own ideas, let us read the words of the Fathers. Athanasius the Great, the Atlas of Orthodoxy, the standard of exactness, says the following: “If a bishop or a presbyter, who are the eyes of the Church, conduct themselves in an evil manner and scandalize the people, they must be plucked out. For it is more profitable to gather in a house of prayer without them, than to be cast together with them, as it were with Annas and Caiaphas, into the gehenna of fire” (VEPES 33, 199). Elsewhere, this luminary of Alexandria says, “Every man who has received discernment from God shall be condemned to punishment if he accepts an ignorant bishop and a false glory as true.” That is to say, according to Athanasius the Great, he that simply scandalizes the people of God and does not live correctly as a bishop, must be cast out of the Church by the Christians. If they who follow an ignorant shepherd and accept a false teaching as Orthodox shall be condemned to punishment, how is it possible for these people to be saved when they have shepherds who have enacted so many betrayals and agreements with the heterodox, and have made so many agreements with politicians and accept the illegal laws of the state. . . . and when the leaders of the Masonic Order claim many of these bishops as members of their organization. . . .

In distinguishing the good shepherd from the evil, the Apostolic Constitutions say the following: “Lest the people say: ‘I am a sheep, and not a shepherd, and I give no account of myself, but the shepherd shall see to it, and he alone shall pay the penalty for me.’ For even as the sheep that follows not the good shepherd shall fall to the wolves unto its own destruction, so too it is evident that the sheep that follows the evil shepherd shall acquire death; for he shall utterly devour it. Therefore, it is required that we flee from ravaging wolves” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, 10:19, PG 1, 633). Each one can judge for himself how much the thinking of contemporary Christians is in agreement with the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Joseph

they understand is that the bishop is the boss, the Sultan, the general. He is the one before whom everyone bows to the ground; who is censured nine times, whereas the icon of Christ is censured only three times;\* he is the one whom the servers vest in church, who gives an account to no one; the one to whom the Church has given a walking stick with which he can hit the heads of those inferior to him and of those who do not obey him, whereas he does nothing to the great and those who have their own dark purposes. These men have understood that “bishop” means the external glory and display that we see in the liturgical life of the Church; it means the episcopal acclamations and “Many Years,” the golden vestments and the little bells, the high and lofty thrones from the heights of which they can look down on the others. They have distorted the significance of all these external forms according to their own passions, and they have come to believe that these external forms apply to *all* bishops, and not simply to those who are exact models of Christ, dispassionate and holy (indeed, how else would it be possible for one not to be harmed spiritually by all this external glory and honor?). These men have not understood that this honor is directed to Christ, and not to them, because the grace of the priesthood which gave them this rank is of Christ, and the Church gave it to them so that Christ should be glorified in their person, and not so that they might steal for themselves the glory and authority that belongs to Another.

Which of them ever thought of giving an account to the people of God, to their flock, for all the things they do, and especially for their presence as representatives of the Church at conferences with heretics, and that they should render an account for what they said and signed to see if the people of God agree with these dealings? — because only then could it be said that they represented the Church and not only themselves at the various conferences. Which of them ever gave an account to the people of God concerning their person-

\* Translator’s Note: In the sacred services of the Church, the icon of Christ is censured thrice, whereas the bishop is censured nine times because the bishop is the living icon of Christ, the *living* successor of the holy Apostles.

al wealth, according to the fortieth Apostolic Canon? Which of them ever rendered an account concerning what salary he receives, and how he uses it, or concerning the income of the diocese, and how it is used? Which bishop ever informed his flock about the decisions of the Episcopal Council, or the episcopal spiritual court, which is the boogie-man used to frighten any priest who might consider going against the *status quo*? Which of them ever asked for the people's opinion on every ordination that they perform, to see what the flock has to say concerning the morals and the beliefs of the candidates for the priesthood? Of course, if there is an exception among the bishops of one who has the fear of God, this serves only to prove the general rule regarding those of whom we are speaking.

#### The Image of the False Bishop

However, if any of them truly understood their real function in the life of the Church, none of them would want to become a bishop, and they would repeat that passage from the Holy Scriptures that says, "Let this cup pass from me." In reality, the bishop is one who lives and experiences the mystery of the Church; who is devoted to God; who is the first to sacrifice himself and die; who is the foremost poor man in his diocese; who is the one who would become anathema for the sake of the salvation of his brethren; who is the one who executes justice for the sake of the weak and of the Church; who is the one who bears the biggest cross in his diocese and not the one who has the biggest limousine; who is the one who is betrayed and not the one who is a betrayer; who is the one who suffers injustice and not the one who is the dread potentate; who is the one who is the first to be responsible for every evil that occurs in the Church, and not the one who heaps all the responsibilities on others, especially on the small and insignificant, and acquires for himself only the honors and the laurel crowns; who is the one who labors quietly and not the one who advertises in newspapers his great accomplishments and works. He is one who does not espouse a tradition alien to the faith and life of the saints; he is one who sacrifices his life for

the truth, and not one who answers with threats when he is censured for his betrayals of the Faith. He is one who speaks and expresses the Church's position in matters pertaining to faith and life, and not one who, while keeping a systematic silence regarding the betrayals taking place in the Church, is outspoken about other subjects, such as science, society, and ecology, and even genetic cloning. The bishop is one who leads his flock to holiness, and not one who leads it to worldliness and indifference.

Therefore, whoever does not have these traits is a bishop in name only, but, in essence, he has broken the oaths he made at his consecration. He is a shepherd in name, but in essence a wolf; a father in name, but in essence a thief; a successor of the Apostles in name, but in essence a successor of the Church's enemies who labored on the devil's side throughout the ages with the purpose of destroying the Church. A "synod" made up of such bishops and governed by such a spirit is a "synod" in name only, a "synod" of those in error, a robber synod.

The Fathers and Holy Tradition made a distinction between these two opposing types of bishops. Regarding the good bishop and true shepherd, who is the true bearer of Holy Tradition and teachings of the Church, they said that the people must show absolute obedience to him as to Christ, and that they should defend and protect him, sacrificing even their very lives. Regarding the evil shepherd and bishop, who was chosen by some synod in the absence of the people of God, and who seeks to take his throne with the help and protection of the state, and who calls in the riot police to send his supposed spiritual children to jail or to the hospital, and who is in agreement with the transgressions of the mighty and not with the people of God, and whose only relation with the Fathers and Tradition is his external appearance — regarding such shepherds the Fathers have said that the people should chase such bishops out of the church and should *not* show them obedience, or commemorate them in the services and in the Holy Mysteries, and that they should